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Shore

NFAC 4233-79

13 August 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Strategic Research

SUBJECT: Research Proposal on Soviet Military Policies

I am sending you my comments separately because
 does not subscribe to them. I nevertheless
think the critical ones worth making although you and your
associates may be aware of the issues involved.

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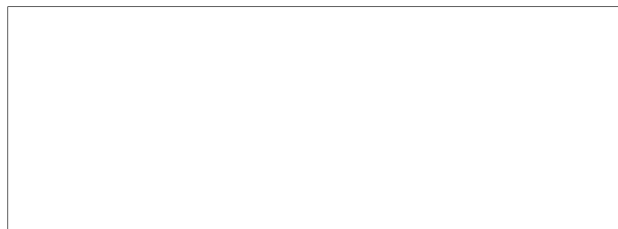
Senior Review Panel

Attachment:
As stated

cc: Dr. Bowie



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1. The interagency research program, aiming at a broad-gauged and integrated analysis of Soviet military policies and forces, seems to me very important. Among other things, it will or should draw attention to the interconnectedness of the individual subjects and to gaps in the previous range of studies and estimates. It is in these two respects that the marginal utility of the programs promises to be highest.

2. Except for some points made below, I also find that the detailed structure of the program is well-developed and balanced, and I welcome especially the intention to accord proper (equal?) attention to Soviet land forces.

3. I hope that program management will remain flexible. As with all broad-gauged research programs, it would be surprising if needs for additional analyses were not discovered in the course of the effort.

4. However, I wonder whether the research effort will not stick excessively to things that are relatively easy to do and for which research capabilities are clearly on hand, and whether it may neglect or deal insufficiently with certain important aspects of some of the subjects. It seems to me that this problem might arise in the two specific research areas involving the major themes of Soviet decisionmaking on defense and Soviet military goals, threat perceptions and requirements.

5. The determination of Soviet defense programs is obviously governed for the most part by relevant bureaucratic practice and politics and economic considerations on the one hand, and by the perceived utility of military forces and their use, on the other hand. Regarding the latter, I noted that domestic political payoffs (in terms of the reputation and support of the regime) are not mentioned although these domestic considerations could be an important determinant of Soviet decision-making in this area. Political leaders expecting elite and popular appreciation of visible Soviet strength might well expand certain kinds of military forces or make them reluctant to reduce defense efforts on, say, economic grounds.

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6. I also wonder whether some of the studies may not be excessively hardware oriented. This might have unfortunate consequences on two analytical levels. First, the utility of military forces obviously depends not only on numbers and hardware, but also on several qualitative factors, especially choices of military strategy and tactics, and the quality human personnel in such terms as education, training, morale, and leadership on various levels. The Soviets are surely aware of this. Is it not possible that some of their choices, including choices of force structure and hardware, must be perceived also as coping with certain qualitative weaknesses or as capitalizing on certain qualitative assets which they think they have relative to the forces (including qualitative components) of prospective opponents.

7. On the other level, Soviet thinking on the use of force--whether physically in combat or in a threatening mode from which external political payoffs may be derived--again turns not only on considerations of relative numbers and hardware. In this respect, a great deal must depend also on Soviet perceptions of the will of potential opponents to use force. For a simple example, if Soviet leaders perceive the capability and willingness to use force of a prospective opponent to be rising, Soviet additions to force will foreshadow enhanced utility for purposes of deterrence and defense. However, Soviet thinking on the matters are probably governed by the perceived opportunity to use military force as well as by the perception of threats to the Soviet Union and its allies. If so, then force improvements are apt to signify increased utility if Soviet leaders perceive the will to use force among potential opponents to be on the decline.

8. It is possible that, for one reason or another, some of these crucial problems are taboo or cannot be matched with adequate research resources. If this is the case, it would be important to warn the consumer of the research results of these omissions so that they will not misinterpret the results. What is left out, yet has a bearing on an understanding of the overall problem should be clearly specified.

9. I repeat a cautionary note made in the SRP review of the proposed NIE on Soviet military R&D. It is easy to operate on the basic assumption of an indefinite arms race between the US and the Soviet Union, and to speculate on future Soviet decisions exclusively in these terms. It is not impossible, however, that Soviet leaders see a choice of building up to a military capacity at some point in time that would permit them to threaten its use for political gains. If they consider this choice, it might importantly affect their force planning.

10. On the other hand, an indefinite arms race is certainly one basis, perhaps the most important, for Soviet military policy. I therefore assume that the analysis of Soviet threat perception will be extended to the perception of the United States as an arms racing power rather than, or in addition to, the United States as potential opponent in a severe crisis or war.



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